

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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Scrupulous Anonymous
One Liguori Drive
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New Year's Resolutions

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Historians have traced New Year's-resolution traditions all the way back to 153 BC. The name of the first month of the year comes from *Janus*, a mythical king of early Rome who symbolized resolutions. He is usually depicted with two faces because he could simultaneously see the past and the future. The first day of the first month of the year is the traditional day on which resolutions are made.

Not everyone engages in resolution-making, and not all who do think they'll be able to keep them. In one study 52 percent of participants were confident they would succeed, but only 12 percent actually did. The difference was usually that the successful

resolvers chose a specific goal over a general one: "I'll lose one pound a week" is much more attainable and measurable than "I'll lose weight."

I imagine at least some SA newsletter readers will make a New Year's resolution about scrupulosity. If you're one of them, you'll be more successful if, instead of making a general resolution like "I'll try to be less scrupulous this year," you make one or more of the following specific ones.

1. I will pray each day

At first glance, this doesn't sound like a New Year's resolution specific to people with scrupulosity, but

I'm not talking about prayer for relief, forgiveness, or even understanding. I'm talking about prayer to help you see and accept yourself as God sees and loves you.

One example is the following prayer, which I use during my Scrupulous Anonymous retreats:

I behold the Christ in you. I lovingly place you in the care of the Father. I release you from all anxiety and concern. I see you as God sees you, a spiritual person created in the image of God, endowed with qualities and abilities that make you needed and important—not only to me, but also to God and his plan. I believe you have the understanding you need to choose life. I bless you. I have faith in you. I behold Jesus in you.

Try praying this at the start of each day, perhaps immediately after you brush your teeth, and begin to experience the power of God's sanctifying grace at work in your life.

2. I'll risk believing I'm capable of goodness

Scrupulous people are experts at listing their faults and failings and identifying their sinfulness, but they're not very good at naming their positive qualities. A good New Year's resolution for the scrupulous is to identify at least one positive thing about themselves during their examination of conscience.

After you examine your sins and failings, take a deep breath, find at least one good and positive experience, and include it in the confession of your sins. You might say something like, "Despite all of my faults and failings, I am also aware and thankful for God's grace in my life, especially for... (name it)."

After a while, take a really big step and risk something even more. "If God can be so good to me in so many small ways that I take so often for granted, will God not also bless me even more in my need at this time, despite my faults and my failings?"

3. I'll say no to isolation

Feelings of guilt, anxiety, the ever-present doubt—all the manifestations of scrupulosity you're so familiar with—become even more toxic when they encourage personal withdrawal and isolation.

So many scrupulous people have an overwhelming feeling of aloneness. Even in a crowd, even among loving family and friends, even at other events where people are engaged in daily life, each moment can be an intense experience of isolation. "I look at all of these people, and I feel so different from them. I just feel like it's better not to be there in the first place."

When you withdraw from life, when the only time you engage in honest conversation about yourself is anonymously behind the curtain or the screen, when your personal world becomes smaller and smaller, when you limit your relationships, and when every day there is less and less personal contact with other people, you unwittingly intensify your feelings of alienation.

A good—but difficult—resolution for the scrupulous is to remain engaged with other people no matter how intensely you want to do otherwise.

Choose rather to be with a friend.

Choose rather to engage fully in family functions and activity.

Choose rather to come out of the darkness and walk into the light.

It may not be easy, but it will be life-giving and energizing and it will provide some of the lived experience of life that enables you to imagine something more for yourself.

4. *I'll expand my horizons*

This simple resolution is the easiest of all: Stop reading, thinking, and worrying about your scrupulosity.

Instead, put that energy into something new, something unknown. Certainly there is something, some experience, some adventure that can

engage your talent, your creativity, your love of life—something you haven't experienced.

This is the year to do it. As the Nike commercial says: Just do it!

What have you got to lose?

What have all the old habits, the old way of thinking, done for you lately?

Simplicity of the Heart

The following is adapted from *The Gift of Simplicity: Heart, Mind, Body, Soul* by Brother Victor-Antoine d'Avila-Latourrette (Liguori Publications, © 2009)

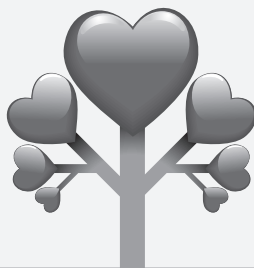
Abba Poemen, for instance, never stopped reminding his disciples of the unique role the heart played in their daily spiritual lives. He often said, "Teach your heart to guard that which your tongue teaches."

Today we conceive of the heart as the seat of all human emotions. However, the prophets and the entire biblical tradition, including Jesus himself, considered the heart to be the center of the human person, its very source of life. The heart is invited to love God above all things. The heart is inclined to obey or disobey God's commandments, for it is in the depths of the human heart that God inscribes his law and commandments. The heart is the very center of each human being; thus we learn that in each human heart, God wishes to establish his most intimate dwelling.

The desert monks emphasized among their disciples the uniqueness and special role of the heart in their spiritual lives. For them, the heart is the place where God reveals himself to us, where he relates and converses with each of us intimately. It is in the depths of our

hearts that this relationship with God is established, grows, and achieves its purpose. As we welcome God's presence into the depths of our hearts, we are able to give ourselves to him wholly in love. With true simplicity of heart, we look at him and also sense his gaze upon us. We embrace and are embraced by him. The human heart, created by God, will recognize and accept that it is made for him alone.

It is our daily task as Christians to aim and seek this humble simplicity of heart. The Lord extends us his grace, and Christ is there to purify us of our sins and forgive our daily shortcomings. Through constant prayer and good works, we also make recourse to the Holy Spirit, begging him to descend into our hearts and make his permanent dwelling there. Through the Holy Spirit, the author of all gifts, the humble gift of simplicity shall be bestowed and implanted in our hearts. He, in his wisdom, will seal the gift deeply within us, creating in the depths of our hearts the living sign of his eternal presence.





SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS MAILBOX

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Q *You've often argued that the "sin against the Holy Spirit" is very difficult to commit. However, I'm sure I've committed it repeatedly.*

A Just because you imagine yourself guilty of the most grievous sin doesn't make it real no matter how deeply you feel it.

I understand the anxiety and fear associated with sin. I understand the depth of feeling and conviction that often accompanies the honest perception of sin. But I also understand that scrupulous people, through no fault or moral failure of their own, are highly susceptible to the idea that they commit the worst possible sin. Good people who love God with all their heart and soul often fall victim to real feelings of inadequacy, failure and, above all, a feeling they somehow haven't pleased God. That's part of the struggle and pain of scrupulosity.

But please be at peace about this matter. You have not committed this sin.

Q *How does one really know if he or she has consented to sin? I'm thinking about sexual sin, especially thoughts and desires.*

A Sexual people (all human beings, including you and I) have sexual thoughts, temptations, desires, and distractions. That's the way God created us.

The mere *presence* of a sexual thought or desire isn't a sin. Sin means you've prepared the way and made possible the action. It's more than that the thought is present—you also have to consider *how* the thought became present. After all, just because you smell dinner cooking on the stove and you know exactly what it is and you can't wait to taste it doesn't mean you cooked it. That's a huge difference, isn't it? And so it is with sin and consent.

2010 Scrupulous Anonymous Retreat

Friday, May 14, 2010 – Sunday, May 16, 2010

Presented by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, C.Ss.R.

Redemptorist Renewal Center, Tucson, Arizona

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